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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to describe male and female participation and success in both debate and individual events national competition and to identify areas of gender-based inequity. Data from three 1984 national tournaments (National Debate Tournament, American Forensic Association's National Individual Events Tournament, and the National Forensic Association's Individual Events Nationals) were analyzed to determine male/female distribution ratios for both preliminary rounds and elimination rounds of competition. Using these ratios, male/female participant and team comparisons were made in debate, while male/female participant comparison by event and event groupings were made in individual events. Exploratory gender research on forensics suggests that debate is perceived to be a male-dominated activity, and actual examination of the male/female participation level at the National Debate Tournament indicated that participation was in fact largely dominated by males. Exploratory research also suggests that individual events is perceived to be a more gender-balanced forensic activity. While descriptive data from the preliminary rounds of competition from the two individual events tournaments suggest a general balance in male/female participation ratios, analysis of the elimination rounds reflects a gender-based imbalance favoring male participants. Males also tended to dominate interpretive events, contrary to perceptions that these activities are more "feminine" and the most likely to provide barriers to male participation because of conflicting sex-role expectations. (Participation data are presented individually for each of the three tournaments.) (HTH)

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GENDER DIFFERENCES: AN ANALYSIS OF MALE/FEMALE PARTICIPATION AT THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

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INTRODUCTION

In order to provide supporting evidence for the educational value of intercollegiate forensics as well as to provide supporting evidence for university expenditures on the activity, educators have continually turned to professionals for whom the experience in intercollegiate forensics proved valuable. Reviews of such testimony appeared as early as 1935 (Church, 1935) while a 1952 survey of political and governmental leaders identified such notables as Richard Nixon, J. William Fulbright, and Supreme Court Justices Thomas Clark and William O. Douglass, Jr. as espousing the importance of debate and speech activities in their educational experience (Freeley, 1960). Two surveys conducted in the legal profession sought opinions on the value of debate preparation for lawyers; whether or not the respondents themselves had participated in educational debate activities, they believed debate to be important in the training of lawyers (Arnold, 1966; McBath, 1961).

Forensic literature also includes testimony from university administrators who attest to the value of forensic experience in their own educational background (Henderson, 1961; Anderson, 1954; Hancher, 1948; Marts, 1940; Maurer, 1937). Broader surveys of university graduates including business leaders (Murray, 1963), and university as well as secondary school graduates with forensic experience (Lunde, 1967; Jackson, 1961; Courter, 1956; Murphy, 1953; Ewbank, 1949; Robinson, 1933) have suggested the perceived educational value of forensic activities.

The gender difference in forensic participation have long been a concern in the forensic community; as early as the 1930's women were

addressing the issue (Knee, 1933). By 1957, the concern was once again expressed (Cole, 1957), and the issue was clearly stated at a national conference jointly sponsored by the American Forensic Association and the Speech Communication Association in 1974. Included among the conference recommendations was a call for research to "determine why certain individuals, women and minority group members, resist involvement" (McBath, 1975). Since 1974, some demographic descriptions of debaters and tournament participants have been developed, but no concerted effort to conduct research recommended by the conference has been made; the extent to which female and minority group participation in forensics is limited remains speculative. Ten years later, the 1984 National Developmental Conference at Northwestern University endorsed a resolution "to increase and strengthen forensic participation by identifying ethnic, racial, gender, and handicap barriers which may currently inhibit student participation as well as disseminate findings concerning such barriers throughout the forensic community."

A recent survey conducted within the forensic community sought to explore the perceptions of male/female participation in forensics (Friedley and Nadler, 1983). The results of this study indicate that males are perceived to be more disproportionately represented in debate participation and that debate is perceived as a "masculine" activity with male participants experiencing few gender-related barriers. Data such as this suggests that males are adhering to sex-role stereotypes and sex-role expectations when they participate in debate because it is perceived as a "masculine" activity. Female debate participants, however, experience more gender-related barriers because they are not adhering to sex-role stereotypes and sex-role expectations.

In individual events, the study reports that male/female participation is perceived as more "balanced." While females are perceived to be more prevalent and have a slight advantage in individual events, both sexes are subject to perceptual limitations in this activity. For example, female participants come closer to meeting sex-role stereotypes and sex-role expectations in individual events; however, perceived barriers of "competitiveness," "aggressiveness," and "intellectual respect" in the original speaking events and limited preparation events is apparent. According to respondents, males also face perceptual barriers primarily in the interpretive events which are perceived to be "feminine;" thus, participants who excel in these events are <u>not</u> perceived to be adhering to sex-role stereotypes and sex-role expectations. As a result, the "homosexual" label is much more likely to be used when describing the barriers experienced by males who participate in the interpretive events.

The benefits accrued through participation in the forensic experience should be available to all individuals regardless of gender. In addition, the argumentative and communicative skills fostered by forensics may be especially beneficial to specific groups of individuals who may not otherwise have the opportunity to develop these skills. Since perceptions "suggest" there is an imbalance in male/female participation, investigation into the actual ratios of male/female participation in forensic activities is warranted. The purpose of this study is two-fold: 1) to describe the male/female participation and success in both debate and individual events national competition and 2) to identify areas of gender-based inequity based on this data.

METHOD

To provide data for this research, three national forensic tournaments which require a qualifying procedure for participation were selected: 1) the National Debate Tournament, 2) the American Forensic Association's National Individual Events Tournament, and 3) the National Forensic Association's Individual Events Nationals. National tournaments with a qualifying procedure were selected to assure participants who had already been judged to represent a level of "success" which warranted participation at a national tournament. As a result, data from these three 1984 national tournaments were analyzed to determine male/female distribution ratios for both preliminary rounds and elimination rounds of competition. Using these ratios, male/female participant and team comparisons were made in debate while male/female participant comparisons by event and event groupings were made in individual events. The research findings are reported individually by national tournament.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

National Debate Tournament

Of the 124 participants who competed at the National Debate Tournament in 1984, 85% were male while 15% were female. A male/female distribution of the 62 teams competing included the following: 73% were male/male debate teams, 24% were male/female debate teams, and only 3% were female/female debate teams. Those participants advancing to quarter-final rounds of competition at this tournament included 87% males and 13% females (a total of 4). Again, a male/female distribution of the 16 teams advancing to elimination rounds included the following: 81% were male/male debate teams, 13% male/female debate teams, and only 1 (6%) female/female debate team.

Semi-final rounds included 15 males (94%) and only 1 female (6%) with 7 (88%) male/male debate teams and 1 (12%) male/female debate team participating; no female/female debate teams advanced beyond the quarter-final rounds at this national tournament. The final round of competition at the National Debate Tournament included 3 males (75% and 1 female (25%); of the top ten speakers designated at the tournament, 9 were males and only 1 was female.

American Forensic Association's National Individual Events Tournament

Of the 861 participants at the 1984 American Forensic Association's National Individual Events Tournament, 58% were male and 42% female. Combining all ten events in the competition, participants advancing to quarter-final rounds were 65% male and 35% female while participants advancing to semi-final rounds were 71% male and 29% female. Participants advancing to the final rounds of competition in the combined ten events were 80% male and 20% female; thus, the gender gap widened as the tournament progressed with females dropping from 42% in preliminary rounds, to 35% in quarter-finals, to 29% in semi-finals, to only 20% in final rounds of competition. Only 13 of the 66 finalists were females.

Of the 257 participants in the original speaking events including informative speaking, persuasive speaking, communication analysis, and after dinner speaking, 57% were male and 43% were female. That relative gender balance in participation was preserved at both the quarter-final rounds in these events (58% male, 42% female) and semi-final rounds of these events (58% male, 42% female). The greatest gender differences in ratios of participation appeared in the final rounds of competition in the original speaking events where 71% of the

finalists were male and only 29% were female. Of the original speaking events, a relative balance in male/female participation for informative (48% male, 52% female) and persuasive speaking (48% male, 52% female) in preliminary rounds of competition. The greatest disparity between male/female participation in preliminary rounds occurred in communication analysis (71% male, 29% female) as well as after dinner speaking (71% male, 29% female). In final rounds of competition in these two events, both informative speaking and communication analysis included 5 males (83%) and only 1 female (17%). Of the original speaking events, persuasive speaking reflected the strongest gender balance with 3 males and 3 females participating in the final round of competition.

Of the 437 participants in the interpretive events of poetry, prose, drama, and dramatic duo, 54% were male and 46% were female. While there was a relative balance between the genders during preliminary rounds of competition, the male/female ratio changed drastically at the outset of the elimination rounds. As a result, 71% of those participants advancing to the quarter-final rounds of competition were male and 39% were female. The gap widened in semi-final rounds (78% male, 22% female) and widened even more in final rounds of competition in the interpretive events (83% male, 17% female). During preliminary rounds of competition in these events, dramatic duo reflected the greatest male/female ratio imbalance where 61% of the participants were male and 39% were female. While preliminary rounds of competition in poetry interpretation indicate a slight female dominance (49% male, 51% female) as well as a slight male dominance in drama interpretation (52% male, 48% female), ratios of male/female participation in these two events shifted drastically by the

final rounds of competition in these two events. In poetry interpretation, only 1 female (17%) and 5 males (83%) advanced to the final round while no females advanced to the final round of competition in dramatic interpretation--all national finalists in this event were males.

Of the 167 participants in the limited preparation events of extemporaneous speaking and impromptu speaking, 69% were male and 31% were female during the preliminary rounds of competition. As participants advanced to the elimination rounds, the male/female ratio of participation increased slightly for females (63% male, 37% female) advancing to quarter-final rounds; however, the male/female ratio of participation decreased for females advancing to semi-final rounds of competition in these events (79% male, 37% female). By the final rounds of competition, these events reflected the greatest male/female ratio disparity of the three event groupings--92% were male and only 1 female (8%) advanced to the final rounds of competition in these events. Specifically, 66 males (72%) and 26 females (28%) participated in preliminary rounds of impromptu speaking competition, but only 2 females (17%) advanced to the semi-final rounds and only 1 female (17%) advanced to the final round of competition in this event. While the male/female participation ratio was a little higher for females in preliminary rounds of extemporaneous speaking (67% male, 33% female), no females advanced to the final round of competition in this event.

National Forensic Association's Individual Events Nationals

Of the 1096 participants at the 1984 National Forensic Association's Individual Events Nationals, 52% were male and 48% were female. Combining all nine events in the competition, participants advancing to quarter-final

rounds were 59% male and 41% female while participants advancing to semi-final rounds were 57% male and 43% female. Participants advancing to the final rounds of competition in the combined nine events were 58% male and 42% female; thus, females constituted 48% of the entries in preliminary rounds and their "success ratio" remained relatively constant throughout the elimination rounds of competition dropping to between 41% and 43%.

Of the 738 participants in the original speaking events including expository speaking, persuasive speaking, rhetorical criticism, and after dinner speaking, 51% were male and 49% were female. In general, balance in the male/female participation ratios in these events was preserved in all three elimination rounds--51% male and 49% female in quarter-final rounds of competition, 52% male and 48% female in semi-final rounds of competition, and 46% male and 54% female in final rounds of competition. Original speaking events in general were the only group of events in which females held a slight edge in the male/female ratio of participation by the final rounds of competition. Of the original speaking events, after dinner speaking with 5 females (83%) and 1 male (17%) as well as expository speaking with 4 females (67%) and 2 males (33%) reflected the greatest ratio of participation for females.

Of the 971 participants in the interpretive events of poetry, prose, and dramatic duo, 49% were male and 51% were female. While there was a relative balance between the genders during preliminary rounds of competition, the male/female ratio during elimination rounds favored the male participants with females constituting 39% of the quarter-finalists, 44% of the semi-finalists, and 38% of the finalists in the interpretive events. The greatest male/female ratio disparity occurred in prose

While this event began with a male/female balance during the preliminary rounds of competition (50% male, 50% female), 5 males (83%) and only 1 female (17%) advanced to the final round of prose interpretation. On the other hand, poetry interpretation preliminary rounds reflected a slightly greater ratio of females (57%) when compared to males (43%); however, by the final round of competition in this event the ratios reflected a greater disparity for males--4 females (67%) and only 2 males (33%) advanced to the final round of competition in poetry interpretation.

Of the 240 participants in the limited preparation events of extemporaneous speaking and impromptu speaking, 62% were male and 38% were female during preliminary rounds of competition. The ratio of female participants compared to male participants in these events decreased slightly through the quarter-final and semi-final elimination rounds with 9 males (75%) and only 3 females (25%) advancing to the final rounds of competition in these events. While participants in preliminary rounds of impromptu speaking were 57% male and 43% female, only 1 female (17%) and 5 males (83%) advanced to the final round--the greatest ratio drop occured between the semi-final rounds (58% male, 42% female) and the final round of competition. In extemporaneous speaking where 69% of the participants in preliminary rounds were male and 31% were female, 4 males (67%) and 2 females (33%) advanced to the final round.

DISCUSSION

While exploratory gender research in forensics suggests that debate is perceived to be a male-dominated activity, actual examination of the male/female participation level at the 1984 National Debate Tournament indicates that participation in the national tournament was largely

dominated by males. Though one female did advance to the final round of this national competition, there were considerably fewer male/female teams and female/female teams competing than male/male teams; in fact, no female/female team advanced beyond the quarter-final rounds of competition. Because previous research suggests that debate is typically perceived as a "masculine" activity and that females who participate in the activity may also be perceived as violating sex-role expectations, this cultural barriers may account for the apparent disparity in female participation in this activity.

Exploratory research also suggests that individual events is perceived to be a more gender-balanced forensic activity. While descriptive data from the preliminary rounds of competition at the 1984 American Forensic Association's National Individual Events Tournament and the 1984 National Forensic Association's Individual Events Nationals suggests a general balance in male/female participation ratios, analysis of the elimination rounds at these tournaments reflect a gender-based imbalance which emerges--an imbalance which favors male participants in this activity. While perceptions of the forensic community suggest that females may have a slight advantage in this activity (particularly in the interpretive events), that perception appears to be inaccurate when compared to actual data.

Specifically, the forensic community perceives that original speaking events and limited preparation events reflect a slight male domination; the data indicate a distinct male domination in these two groupings of events at the American Forensic Association's national tournament while only a male domination in the limited preparation grouping of events at the National Forensic Association's national tournament. Perhaps the most surprising finding, however, is associated with the male/female

participation and success in the interpretive events. While these events were generally perceived to be more "feminine" in previous research and the ones most likely to provide a barrier to male participation because of conflicting sex-role expectations associated with the events, analysis of the data concerning male/female participation ratios at the two national tournaments does not support this perception; instead, males tend to dominate this group of events slightly at the preliminary level of competition and tend to dominate this group of events greatly in the elimination rounds of competition, especially at the American Forensic Association's national tournament.

While this finding appears to be inconsistent with typical perceptions of sex-role typing and the constraints of such typing, there may be some explanations for this phenomenon. First, the majority of the literature in our culture has been written by males and about males--males write the best "parts" for males. As a result, literature which provides the most challenge for males may also provide the most viable outlet for success among males interpreting that literature. Second, those judging "success" in this activity may strive to reward males who are willing to violate sex-role typing because of the risk associated with such violation. As a result, the male who is willing to portray emotional and aesthetic aspects of literature may be more highly rewarded than his female counterpart who portrays such aspects in literature interpretation or who excels in the most cognitively-oriented aspects typically associated with the original speaking events. Regardless of the reason, analysis of the two national tournaments in individual events suggests there is discrimination which may be gender-based.

Finally, it is important to note a gender difference between male/female participation at the two national tournaments in individual events. Overall, the results from the 1984 tournaments clearly document that the American Forensic Association national tournament was more male-dominated in both participation levels and especially in success levels than the National Forensic Association national tournament. Again, this finding may occur for several reasons. First, the American Forensic Association clearly has its roots in debate--the first national tournament in individual events was held in 1978 compared to a long history of national tournaments in debate. While the organization clearly has a commitment to the growth and development of individual events, much of its support is generated from programs with a strong debate tradition and potentially a strong male-dominated debate tradition. This potential "old-boy network" which may be more apparent in both coaching and judging associated with this tournament may also be reflected in the male-dominated participation and success at this tournament; the National Forensic Association is not historically associated with debate and does not currently host a national debate tournament. Second, the National Forensic Association philosophy provides a broader-based tournament with a qualifying method that is more conducive to participation by community colleges as well as smaller colleges and universities. While speculative, female coaches and judges who may be more prevalent at these institutions may reflect a greater participation and a higher level of success from females at this national tournament. Regardless of the reason, females enjoyed a significantly higher level of success in 1984 at the National Forensic Association tournament than they did at the American Forensic Association tournament.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While this research provides an initial analysis of male/female participation and level of success at both debate and individual events national tournaments, it is only the first step necessary to identify some of the gender barriers confronted by participants in this educational activity. With this initial analysis, however, the authors clearly recognize the need for continued research to identify and explore the impact of gender barriers in the activity.

First, similar research which examines the same type of data over a period including several national tournaments would certainly provide a greater sense of "trend" than the current study. If this trend suggests a movement toward a balance in male/female participation, then we as educators are heading in the right direction toward meeting the goal of providing this activity for all individuals regardless of gender. If, on the other hand, trends indicate continued levels of male/female disparity in participation and/or success, then a concerted effort to address and overcome these barriers must be undertaken.

Second, male/female participation and success in forensics should also be examined on a regional basis. Data from the national tournaments may be examined from a regional perspective to indicate regional differences that will provide additional insight into addressing gender issues. In addition, data collected from regional tournaments throughout the year could provide helpful information to determine if male/female participation and success at the regional level is comparable to that represented at the national tournaments. Specifically, even greater male/female participation and success disparities may exist at the regional level of competition.

Third, additional levels of forensic participation as well as areas of forensic competition should be examined for male/female participation and success. For example, high school forensic competition and community college forensic competition should be examined to see if such disparities and potential gender barriers exist. In addition, such areas as CEDA debate should be included in exploratory research to determine if areas of forensics not explored in this research provide fewer gender barriers to participation.

Finally, research which focuses on the impact of gender among judges in the activity may offer the most valuable insight into why females aren't experiencing the level of success in both activities as males. Since these individuals judge what is considered "successful" in this competitive activity, an examination of perceived gender variables and their impact on the competitive setting might begin to explain "why" such barriers occur.

CONCLUSION

While this research is somewhat limited in its scope, it does provide an exploratory examination of male/female participation and success at both debate and individual events national tournaments. Perhaps the most significant finding of this research is that some gender-based perceptions held by the forensic community may be supported while others are not. While debate may appear to be a male-dominated activity as perceptions suggest, individual events may not provide as much gender balance as perceived by the forensic community. It appears that regardless of the forensic activity, males in general enjoy a dominance which ranges from "slight" to "overwhelming." If gender-based perceptions in the

forensic community are directly related to the participation and success of males and females in the activity, then such research may provide the key to bringing about awareness and eventual change of gender-based attitudes within the forensic community.

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